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## Editorial

# Abecedarium: Who am I? N'

### Dear colleagues

It was December 1948 in New York and I was operating on a patient for abdominal pain that had been attributed to intestinal cysts. During surgery, I came upon an aortic aneurysm the size of a grapefruit. So I wrapped it in cellophane. . . The image of the patient sticking his tongue out at the paparazzi as he left the hospital went, as you would say, viral. I had just added 5 years to the life of Albert Einstein. At the time, I was very nearly as famous as he was, and it was not by chance that he had come to be operated on by me at the Jewish Hospital in Brooklyn. Judge for yourselves: the story is an epic spanning the two world wars of the 20th century. . .

I was born in September 1896, in Neisse, Germany, son of a successful surgeon one of whose good friends was a Polish colleague, whose name begins with an M and who also wrote to you in this Abecedarium. I started my medical studies in 1914, but did not complete them until 1920: during this time, I served as a military nursing officer, and was wounded several times; I was one of the many heroes of the First World War. When peace was restored, I intended to go into private practice and take over my father's practice in Neisse. My talents, however, had attracted the attention of Pr Sauerbruch, one of the leading lights of contemporary surgery. He took me under his wing, first in Munich and then, when he was appointed there, in the Charité Hospital in Berlin. I was nominated "professor extraordinary" in 1930, and remained in that position until 1933.

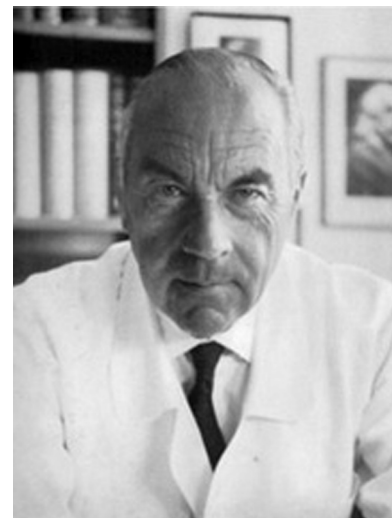
In that year, the regime ordered me to get rid of my Jewish assistants. As I was a Jew, although not religious, myself, I refused to bend to the will of the Nazi party and, despite having the protection still afforded to veterans of the Great War, I resigned. Just before the blacklist of Jewish businesses came into force, I left Germany, intending to make for America via Switzerland; on the way, however, I was approached by the Turkish authorities who invited me to take over the chair of surgery in Istanbul. I accepted the offer; but in 1938, a bullet left in my lungs from the War began causing me problems. My contract had come to an end. Germany was Turkey's major trading partner, and my reputation as an anti-Nazi was not entirely held to my credit. The time had come to make the journey, with all the family, to the States, where I underwent treatment and then took up hospital posts, first in Boston and later in New York. After the Second World War, I was offered a position in the University of Hamburg, but I declined: some wounds refuse to heal. . . When, on the other hand, the University of Basel invited me to run

their Department of Surgery in 1952, I was glad to accept; and in 1961 I rose to the rank of Professor Emeritus. I retired in 1967, and died on October 22nd, 1981.

My career makes me the precursor of the "medical mobility" that is so much in vogue throughout the world (with, of course, the exception of France) in your time. But I am also known as a prolific author, with more than 450 articles and 30 books on surgery to my name, an innovator and one of the fathers of modern surgery in the 20th century. In America, there are several health centers named for me. My prime concerns were respect for the patient, medical ethics and the strict application of scientific principles to the practice of surgery. Among my numerous innovations, one targeted a condition that especially concerns ENT physicians: I am the one who developed the treatment of gastroesophageal reflux disease by fundoplication; although less widely used since the advent of proton pump inhibitors, it still bears my name and that of my assistant.

With my very best wishes (expressed in German, English or Turkish),

Yours truly,  
 Rudolph Nissen.



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**Disclosure of interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest concerning this article.

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